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REPORT

OF

A. D. F. HAMLIN

Consulting Architect

TO THE

COMMITTEE HAVING CHARGE OF THE ERECTION OF

CARNEGIE LIBRARY BUILDINGS

IN THE

BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

1901

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To the Committee for Erecting Carnegie Libraries in Brooklyn:

GENTLEMEN—In compliance with your request, I have carefully studied the problem upon which you have asked my advice, and beg to submit herewith my conclusions.

The question of the wisest possible procedure for procuring the designs and selecting the architects of the proposed Carnegie libraries in Brooklyn, concerns chiefly three classes of interests: those of the libraries themselves; those of the general public who use them; and those of the architectural profession, upon whose members you must depend for the proper satisfaction of the other two classes.

It is plain that whatever architectural solution of the problem best serves the needs and functions of the library, serves also to the same extent the people who use it and the community of which they are a part. But in the matter of æsthetic beauty the general public have also an interest independent of the library itself. For a well-planned and convenient edifice, serving well the needs of the library, may yet be a cause of offense to the public by reason of its unattractiveness or its positive ugliness of architectural treatment.

It is therefore essential, first, to make sure of such planning and arrangement as will most perfectly subserve the uses of the proposed libraries; and, secondly, to secure an architectural treatment of the buildings that shall be satisfactory from an architectural point of view. These libraries are in a sense public monuments, destined to endure for long periods of time, and should possess those permanent qualities of artistic dignity and refined elegance which always win the approval of good taste, in spite of changes of style or fashion.

So far as the architectural profession is concerned, results such as have been outlined above will command the approval of architects generally. Private and local preferences must not interfere with the higher interests of the enterprise, and any procedure that demonstrably serves these interests fulfills also your obligations to the profession at large.

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The above considerations are fundamental and axiomatic. The questions really requiring discussion relate to details. They seem to me to be as follows :

(I.) What shall be the type or types of the proposed libraries, and how shall they be determined ?

(II.) To what extent shall the architectural treatment of the buildings be uniform, and to what extent varied ?

(III.) How many architects shall be employed ?

(IV.) How shall these be selected ?

(V.) Shall the procedure adopted be limited to the buildings first undertaken, or extended to cover the whole enterprise, from inception to completion ?

(I.) What shall be the type or types of the proposed libraries, and how shall it or they be determined ?

In answer to this I recommend that you instruct your professional adviser to prepare, in conference with the Librarian of the Public Library, a program of instructions to architects, embodying in a form similar to that of a competition program a detailed statement of the requirements of the proposed libraries; this program, when approved by your Committee, to serve for the guidance of the architects employed.

I recommend further, that each of the architects selected be instructed to prepare a design for one building; but that in the preparation of these designs all the architects collaborate and confer with the utmost freedom, both formally and informally, alike with each other and with your Librarian and your professional adviser, as representing your Committee; so that each design shall represent its author's conception of the building as developed in the light of the fullest discussion and information. The conditions will thus be very different from those of an ordinary competition, which involve a large measure of secrecy in each man's work.

The sketch-designs thus prepared will furnish the Committee with the necessary data for deciding the question of type. It will be, in all likelihood, clear from these designs whether one among them is so superior as to furnish a manifest type to be followed in all the libraries; or whether on the other hand two or more designs differing materially in arrangement and yet equally

serviceable and convenient, are worthy of adoption and can be employed consistently with that unity of general character which ought to mark all the libraries under this gift. It may well prove to be the case in Brooklyn, where the topography, shape and dimensions of lots and the cost of land are so much more varied than they are in Manhattan, that no such unity of type can be maintained as is possible in Manhattan. There is likely at least to be the variation required by the difference between a lot between party-walls and one at the corner of two streets. The Committee will be able, after examining the plans submitted and listening to the recommendations of their architects, to decide the question in the light of practical experience in the solution of specific problems, instead of reaching in advance an arbitrary decision on abstract principles.

(II.) *To what extent should the architectural treatment of all the libraries be uniform, and to what extent varied?*

The size and requirements of the libraries being presumably identical, or nearly so, and these requirements being set forth in precise terms in the instructions to your architects, there must result a measure of similarity in the arrangements of the different buildings.

How far this will be modified by differences of site and by the personal equation of the designers, it is impossible to foretell. While the Committee may in its program of instructions, and as a matter of general policy, insist on the desirability of a prevailing unity of style and character in the architecture of all the buildings, which should mark them as unmistakably Carnegie libraries, it would hardly be wise to go farther than this. The precise measure of restraint to be imposed on individual variations of design can be better determined in the light of actual experience, as the result of the experiment in cooperative design above outlined.

(III.) *How many architects shall be employed?*

As many, in my opinion, as there are libraries to be undertaken the first year, provided these be no more than five. A larger number would form an unwieldy body, liable to work at cross-purposes, or at least in entire independence of each other, frustrating the mutual cooperation which this scheme proposes as an

essential feature of the preliminary stages of the enterprise. If more than five libraries are to be undertaken at the outset, five of them should be assigned to the five architects, to start with, and the question left open whether the balance should be given to them, and if so, to which ones among them, or to outside architects. Your experience with them and their designs will make this question comparatively easy of solution. The probability is wholly in favor of continuing them in office, and entrusting to them the remaining libraries.

(IV.) *How shall the architects be selected?*

It is possible to select the architects by a competition. This is, however, a slow and expensive procedure. If it be adopted not less than ten to fifteen architects should be invited to compete, and be paid an honorarium of \$250 each; only sketch-designs should be required, and the authors of the five best designs should receive appointment as your architects. The only advantage of this procedure would be the quieting of the clamor of a certain small class of objectors, who insist that the opportunity of such an architectural enterprise should be thrown open to as many as possible of the architects of Brooklyn.

My own preference is distinctly for direct selection and appointment of the architects who are to serve you. In this selection both actual achievement, in the case of the older men, and, in the case of the younger practitioners, evidence of decided talent and thorough training, are legitimate considerations. It is also wise to include in the selection men of somewhat diverse talents, so as to embrace engineering experience, artistic ability, and mature practical judgment. The men should be such as can work together in harmony. For reasons of local civic policy, so far as these do not conflict with the higher interests of the enterprise, it may be desirable to select only residents of the Borough. Each one of those selected may represent a firm, but only he should appear and have a vote in consultations on matters of common interest. Your adviser will willingly assist in making the selection, if so desired.

(V.) *Shall this procedure be limited to the first group of libraries or extended to cover all?*

The underlying thought of this scheme has been to safeguard the freedom of action of your Committee by refusing to cross

bridges before they were reached. Hard and fast rules could easily be laid down to control the whole enterprise from start to finish. But this is too important and complex an undertaking to be confined within the limits of arbitrary preconceptions. This scheme provides for meeting each question as it comes up and not before, with the help of all the experience previously acquired. Whether the same architects who design the first group of libraries should also design all the others or not depends largely upon their success with the first group. Whether the type adopted for this group shall be insisted upon for the later libraries must likewise depend in great measure upon how successful the first group turn out to be.

To sum up, then, your adviser recommends:

1. That your Committee select and appoint a small number of architects, preferably five (each being permitted to represent a firm), to constitute an Advisory Commission upon all the architectural questions involved in the first group of libraries to be erected, and upon such further questions as you may choose to refer to their judgment.
2. That you issue to this Advisory Commission a definite program, to be prepared by your professional adviser in conference with the Librarian of the Public Library, setting forth the conditions and requirements of the proposed buildings.
3. That each member of the Advisory Commission be instructed to prepare a design for one library, the apportionment among them to be determined by the members themselves, who shall also, meeting as a Commission, have power to determine all general questions affecting their work, not already determined in the instructions given them. These designs shall represent the result of full collaboration and free discussion in Commission, and the members shall have free access to the Librarian and to your adviser in all matters in which these can be of assistance.
4. The Advisory Commission shall submit these designs to your Committee, and with them also such recommendations as they may choose to make with regard to the general policy and further procedure of your Committee and the details of the architectural treatment of the Carnegie Gift. Your Committee shall then, in the light of these recommendations, and of the designs submitted, prepare their final instructions to the members of the

Advisory Commission, who shall then proceed to prepare the working drawings for the proposed group of libraries, in accordance with these instructions. In these deliberations the services of your professional adviser shall be always at the service of your Committee.

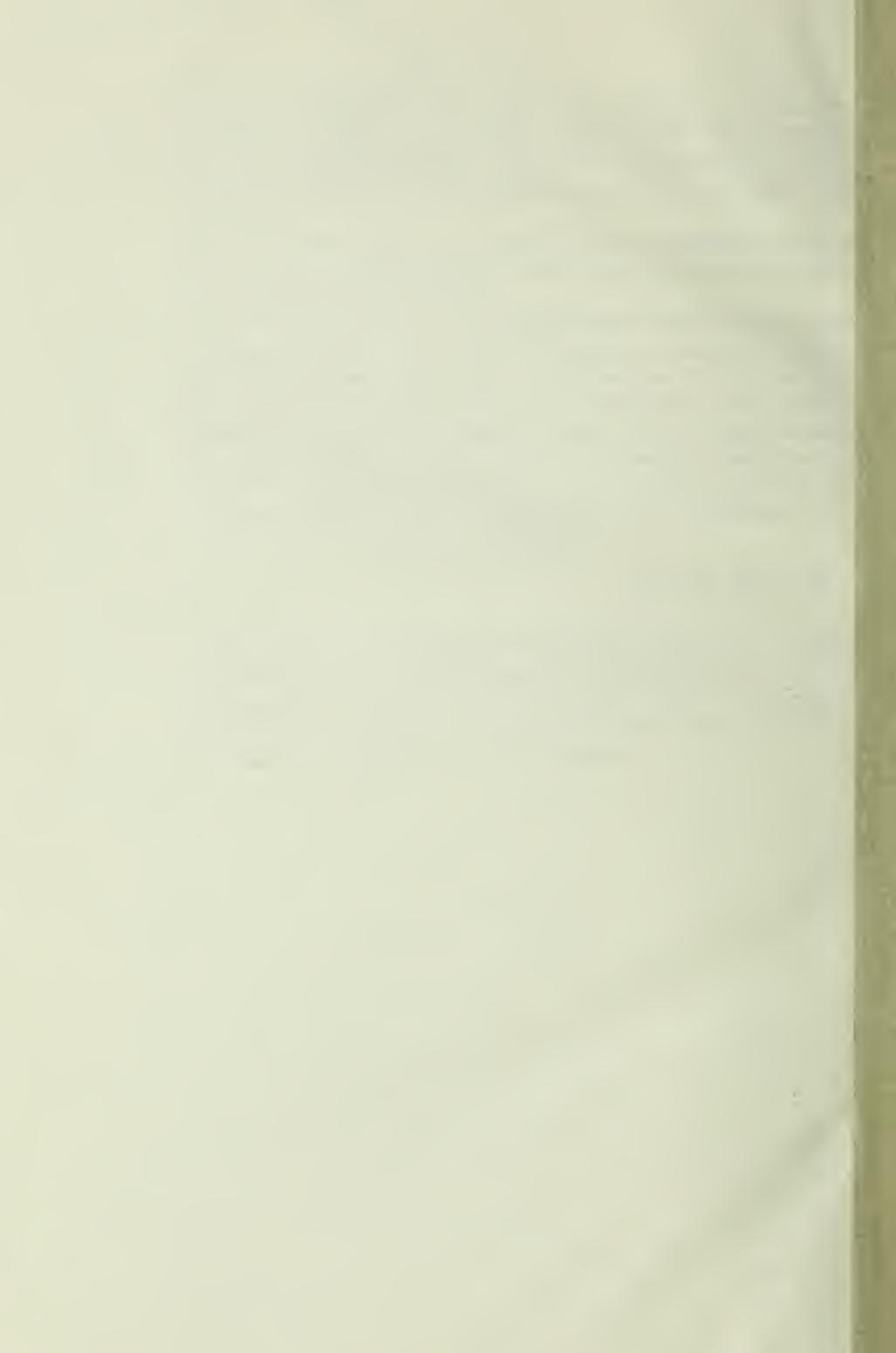
5. The policy to govern the next and all subsequent groups of libraries shall be formulated and announced at such later time as your Committee may appoint.

6. For their services as architects to the Committee for erecting Carnegie libraries in Brooklyn all architects employed shall be paid the customary commission of five per cent. for full services; and for partial services at the rates established by the American Institute of Architects, except that, when two or more libraries are erected from the same design, the commission shall be four per cent. for the second and three per cent. for the third and subsequent libraries; and for partial services in proportion.

All which is respectfully submitted,

A. D. F. HAMLIN.

The report was adopted by the Carnegie Committee, consisting of Messrs. David A. Boody, Daniel W. McWilliams, R. Ross Appleton, John W. Devoy, and becomes the basis of agreement between the Committee and the architects. More detailed information will be given in a later circular.



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